

Frequently Asked Questions about the Mopac 1 Project



QUESTIONS:

1. **How did the Loop 1 (MoPac Expressway) corridor develop?**
2. **What are some of the problems in the Loop 1 corridor?**
3. **What kinds of improvements are being considered for Loop 1?**
4. **Hasn't a study on Loop 1 already been done?**
5. **Why is the current project limited to this area of Loop 1?**
6. **How is the best option going to be selected?**
7. **Is this project already a "done deal"?**
8. **How can I stay informed about the project and get involved in the decision-making process?**
9. **How can I be sure my comments are heard?**
10. **Will this project address noise issues in the Loop 1 corridor?**
11. **Why is MoPac called a "loop" when it doesn't encircle Austin?**

1. How did the Loop 1 (MoPac Expressway) corridor develop?

The first mention of the need for a north-south thoroughfare in West Austin came into the public record in 1929. Some 15 years later, in 1944, the City of Austin Planning Commission proposed a thoroughfare be built on portions of under-utilized right-of-way owned by the Missouri-Pacific (MoPac) Railroad. Sometime thereafter, the proposed highway became known as MoPac Boulevard because of its proximity to the railroad.

The City of Austin advanced the project throughout the 1950s and local voters approved bond packages for the purchase of necessary rights-of-way. The City of Austin Department of Public Works commissioned engineer W. C. Cotten to prepare a preliminary design for the thoroughfare. His report, presented to the Austin City Council in late 1961, laid the foundation for subsequent engineering and design work on the highway. In the early- to mid-1960s, several bridges and other facilities were constructed to provide safe crossings for vehicles over and under the busy railway lines.

In September 1966, the City of Austin and Travis County sought financial assistance from the Texas Highway Commission to help build the facility. The parties entered into an agreement in April 1967 after conditions of the Commission's participation were identified. Then, in October 1967, the Highway Commission officially designated the project State Highway Loop No. 1 (Loop 1 or SL 1), running from Farm to Market (FM) 1325 north of Austin to US 290 southwest of Austin. Despite its new official name, however, the general public continued to refer to the highway simply as "MoPac."

In 1982, Loop 1 construction was completed from US 183 (Research Boulevard) to Loop 360 (the Capital of Texas Highway). Work on the northern extension of Loop 1 to FM 1325 commenced in 1986 and was completed in 1989. Also in 1986, the Austin Transportation Study (ATS, now known as the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, or CAMPO), adopted a plan to extend Loop 1 from US 290 south to the proposed State Highway (SH) 45. The Texas Transportation Commission amended its designation of Loop 1 to include the extension south to SH 45, consistent with the revised ATS plan. Construction of the extension concluded in 1994, largely completing the MoPac Expressway as it exists today.

2. What are some of the problems in the Loop 1 corridor?

The Austin area has grown quickly, with the area's population increasing by 48% from 1990 to 2000. With this rapid population growth, traffic along the Loop 1 corridor has likewise increased significantly. For example, over the same period of time, average daily traffic on Loop 1 at Ranch to Market (RM) 2222 has increased from 111,000 to 156,000 vehicles per day. Traffic demand is projected to further increase to more than 211,000 vehicles per day by the year 2010, and to nearly 320,000 vehicles per day by the year 2030. Traffic on Loop 1 is congested for several hours every day, resulting in longer travel times for corridor users. As traffic congestion has increased in the Loop 1 corridor, adjacent neighborhoods have become increasingly affected by cut-through traffic, noise, and other community issues.

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3. What kinds of improvements are being considered for Loop 1?

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) initiated the *MoPac 1* project to explore the options for improving travel conditions on Loop 1. The *MoPac 1* project will proceed in two stages. Initially the project will focus on near-term improvements to address transportation needs over the next five to ten years on Loop 1 between FM 734 (Parmer Lane) and the Cesar Chavez Street interchange. A long-term project will focus on a comprehensive series of improvements to address the long-range transportation and community needs for the Loop 1 corridor from FM 734 south to SH 45.

The *MoPac 1* project is the next logical step in the evolution of the role of Loop 1 in serving the Austin area. *MoPac 1* will study the feasibility of managed lanes for Loop 1, consistent with and included in the *Mobility 2030 Plan* as adopted by the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) in June, 2005. Additional options under consideration include various transportation system management (TSM) strategies to improve traffic flow, increasing capacity through the addition of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, and other strategies to encourage travelers to use public transit.

4. Hasn't a study on Loop 1 already been done?

Several years ago, TxDOT studied long-range alternatives for both Loop 1 and US 183. Austin-area residents expressed concerns with some of the options proposed at that time, and as a result, the current project will study the feasibility of adding managed lanes and other possible traffic solutions to Loop 1 without acquiring additional residential or commercial property along the existing right-of-way and without constructing elevated traffic lanes. The *MoPac 1* project will not consider adding tolls to existing lanes along Loop 1. *MoPac 1* builds on previous studies and plans, including the *CAMPO Mobility 2030 Plan*. In addition, the *MoPac 1* project will address community concerns, such as traffic noise, beginning with a comprehensive analysis that will identify areas adjacent to Loop 1 that would be impacted by traffic noise and would benefit from feasible and reasonable noise abatement, such as noise barriers, in accordance with TxDOT's federally approved noise guidelines.

5. Why is the current project limited to this area of Loop 1?

Initially the *MoPac 1* project will address improvements from FM 734 (Parmer Lane) south to the Cesar Chavez Street interchange. The extension of Loop 1 north to State Highway (SH) 45 is currently scheduled to open in the fall of 2006, potentially placing an additional strain on the corridor. It appears that some improvements can be made to this section in the near-term that will provide some congestion relief to the existing facility. Long-range solutions for 23 miles of the Loop 1 corridor from FM 734 south to SH 45 will require more extensive analysis to address the area's transportation needs and accommodate community concerns and priorities.

6. How is the best option going to be selected?

TxDOT must follow state and federal requirements in developing the *MoPac 1* project, consistent with the National Environmental Policy Act (commonly referred to as "NEPA"), before choosing the best solutions for Loop 1 travel needs. The *MoPac 1* project team will explore several options to improve conditions along Loop 1, including managed lanes consistent with the *CAMPO Mobility 2030 Plan* (see FAQ 3 above).

Public and local agency input will be critical in deciding what corridor improvements should be implemented, along with an analysis of how well various options meet the transportation needs of the corridor and how those transportation options effect the environment. The alternatives will be also analyzed from a financial perspective, including the total cost of each option, the state's ability to pay for different options, and the benefits of the proposed improvements in relation to their costs.

7. Is this project already a "done deal"?

No. Decisions on how to best improve the corridor from FM 734 (Parmer Lane) to the Cesar Chavez Street interchange will be made over the next 18 months, based on the results of technical and environmental analysis and input from the public and local agencies. An extensive public outreach program is an intrinsic part of this project. The public will be involved throughout the process, including identifying corridor issues, evaluating improvement options, and selecting a preferred alternative for improving the corridor.

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8. How can I stay informed about the project and get involved in the decision-making process?

Public involvement is critical to the success of *MoPac 1*. The public outreach program provides corridor residents, roadway users, local agencies and other interested parties many different ways to obtain information about the project, provide information to the project team, and participate in determining what near term improvements will best meet the area's transportation needs while respecting Austin's unique character. Project team members will be available throughout the process to meet with neighborhood associations, community groups and others to discuss issues of concern, various improvement options, and the results of technical and environmental analyses. Several open houses, informal meetings, and a public hearing will be held over the next 18 months.

Several resources will be available to make information about the *MoPac 1* project readily available to the public:

- *MoPac 1* Information Line at 498-7700.
- Online *MoPac 1* e-Updates.
- Online and print versions of the *MoPac 1* Newsletter.
- A soon-to-be-unveiled *MoPac 1* project website (www.MoPac1.org)

9. How can I be sure my comments are heard?

Communication between the public and the project team members is one of the most vital components of this project. The comments, concerns, recommendations and suggestions given by community members, individuals, organizations, groups, and all stakeholders throughout the duration of the project will be considered during the entire project development and decision-making process.

Comments can be submitted at any time during the project development process and can be submitted verbally in person or by phone or written via US mail, e-mail, delivery or by fax. All comments will be taken into consideration during the project development process.

Comments taken as a result of an open house, public meeting or public hearing will become part of the official records of those particular events. Specifically, written and verbal comments received at the open houses, public meetings and the public hearing will be put into the official record of those events. Also, comments received within 10 days after those events in written format will be part of the official record of those events. Written comments will be accepted via personal delivery, delivery service, US mail or by fax. Comments received via e-mail will not be in the official record of those events but will be taken into consideration throughout the development of the project.

10. Will this project address noise issues in the Loop 1 corridor?

Yes. A comprehensive analysis of noise conditions along Loop 1 between FM 734 (Parmer Lane) and the Cesar Chavez Street interchange is being conducted to identify areas adjacent to the highway that would be impacted by traffic noise and that would benefit from reasonable and feasible noise abatement, such as noise barriers, in accordance with TxDOT's federally approved noise guidelines.

A series of noise education forums will be conducted on the topic of traffic noise with community residents. At that time the public can learn more about specific regulations and requirements associated with noise analysis and noise abatement options.

11. Why is MoPac called a "loop" when it doesn't encircle Austin?

The official designation for MoPac is State Highway Loop No. 1, which is abbreviated by TxDOT for signing and communication purposes as Loop 1 or SL 1. There is no directive that highway loops must circle cities. Usually, they are designated to connect two different highways in a geographic area. Many highway loops in Texas are formed when highways are relocated around cities. The relocated highway may keep the original designation and the existing highway may be redesignated as a loop, or vice versa.

The idea that highway loops are supposed to encircle a city can probably be attributed to the fact that across Texas, there are several cities that do have highway loops surrounding them, such as Loop 1604 in San Antonio, Loop 12 in Dallas, and Beltway 8 in Houston.

However, more frequently the loop highways do not encircle cities, as evidenced in Austin by Loop 111 (Airport Boulevard), Loop 275 (North Lamar Boulevard and South Congress Avenue), Loop 360 (Capital of Texas Highway) and Loop 1 (MoPac Expressway).

Contact Us!

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Look for the soon-to-be-available

***MoPac 1* website:** www.MoPac1.org